

Alaska Recreation Fee Demonstration Evaluation FY02

Best Practices

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Campbell Tract Recreation Area

The team was impressed by the Science Center, the many programs and services it provides, as well as the high level of community involvement at the Center. The Science Center has accomplished many of the goals of the BLM Environmental Education National Strategy while it continues to expand its educational programs and interpretive services. The Science Center has been the recipient of numerous awards, some of which were presented to them by the local school district and university for their community involvement and contributions. The Science Center has also received overwhelming support from the community at large for the educational and recreational opportunities it provides.

The Campbell Creek Science Center is a unique recreation fee demonstration site within BLM as it focuses almost exclusively on environmental education. Data from the recreation fee demonstration sites across BLM uniformly show that environmental education and interpretive services are the areas with the greatest leverage. That is, the public indicates that these services greatly contribute to overall satisfaction in the recreation experience, but the current delivery of these services is poor or lacking. Thus, lessons learned from the CCSC may be transferred to many sites.

1. *The environmental education center model itself.* The Center Director's presentation to annual meeting of the North American Association for Environmental Education (Vancouver, BC; Aug. 1997) contains general considerations for establishing a successful environmental education center. The Campbell Creek Science Center's guiding standards are contained in the BLM Environmental Education National Strategy (1995). The Center has worked to meet these standards, focusing almost exclusively on this guidance as its operating philosophy.
 - a. The CCSC staff has accomplished many of the goals of the BLM Environmental Education National Strategy to develop science programs in partnership with local schools and to establish public outreach programs. To meet the strategy's Schools Partners Program, they have developed, field-tested, and refined more than 25 educational programs, including the Earth Ranger Academy (a 3-day program about ecosystems for 6th graders), Earth Science Day (about geologic time, gold mining, minerals, and glaciers), 14 programs (kindergarten through 6th grade) related to state and national science standards, Outdoor Week (an annual outdoor event with hands-on science activities for 2,500 local 6th-grade students), and Project WET (an annual water education event for 360 fourth-grade students).

- b. To meet the strategy's Public Education and Participation Program, staff initiated and developed the Fireside Chats (a monthly lecture series on natural resource topics), the Midsummer Night's Science Series (summer science workshops for families), the Backyard Discoveries Program (a volunteer-based ecosystem monitoring program involving natural inventories, field collections, and data-gathering stations on Campbell Tract), an annual open house (complete with indoor and outdoor science activities for people of all ages), and the Interpretive Naturalist Certification Program of Alaska (a community-wide program designed to train local citizens to become better naturalists, interpreters, environmental educators, and science teachers).
2. *Diverse Assortment of Educational Programs.* The inventory of over 25 educational modules, many of which could be used elsewhere, is a clear best practice. The website for the CCSC contains some step-by-step descriptions of how to implement some of these programs (www.sciencecenter.ak.blm.gov). As an example, Science in a Backpack, part of the Backyard Discoveries volunteer-based ecosystem monitoring program, is an easily packaged and transferable concept for many other BLM environmental education support centers, particularly those near urban centers such as the Cascade Streamwatch and Yaquina Head in Oregon, the Moab Information Center and St. George Interagency Information Center in Utah, and Red Rock Canyon in Nevada. Another example is the upcoming interactive kiosk and web site on the topic of Energy.
3. *High Degree of Community Involvement and Partnership.* The Center is operated by the BLM-Anchorage Field Office with assistance from many partners and volunteers. A Memorandum of Understanding outlines the roles and responsibilities among 19 partner organizations. Further, the Center has partnered with the Anchorage School District in the design of the facility, development and field-testing of educational programs, teacher training, and staff training.
4. *The Interpretive Naturalist Certification Program of Alaska.* This is a community-wide program designed to train local citizens to become better interpreters, environmental educators, and non-formal science teacher. It has been developed very recently by the CCSC. Given the demand for increased interpretation in BLM, this program is a very cost-efficient way to address this public demand. This program already has more than 60 candidates pursuing certification. Further, a Memorandum of Understanding with 9 organizations is in place to broaden the community support for the candidates. This model is clearly marketable to the public interested in volunteering and creates a myriad of mutual benefits. Further, the model is transferable and could be used broadly across BLM recreation sites, particularly those with high wildlife viewing or cultural opportunities.

Other Areas of Positive Performance include:

5. *Use of grants and donations to leverage staff and operational funding.* Over the past ten years the Center has averaged \$22.7 thousand per year in grant monies and in-

kind donations. The CCSC has augmented its budget by seeking grants in amounts up to \$40,000 from businesses and institutions throughout the nation. The Center routinely submits grants and receives funding to support its National Public Lands Day projects. Local food establishments, outdoor equipment businesses, and other organizations also regularly donate.

6. *Extensive use of volunteer workers* - The CCSC uses volunteer workers extensively to support the program goals of the CCSC, including recreation operations and maintenance, education programs, ecosystem monitoring efforts, and developing scientific collections. Volunteers also support the CCSC by:
 - a. Assisting education specialists in conducting teacher training and workshops on environmental education-related topics.
 - b. Conducting nature walks, interpretive talks, lectures, and hands-on activities for children and adults.
 - c. Conceiving, developing, and testing new environmental education programs for summer, evening, or weekend use and for specific target audiences (e.g., early elementary, high school, families, girl and boy scouts groups, and the general public).
 - d. Providing speakers or presenters at special events such as Outdoor Week, Project WET Water Education Festival, and the annual CCSC open house.
 - e. Writing grant proposals or conducting other forms of fund-raising to obtain financial support for specific needs of the Center (e.g., scientific/educational/computer equipment, student scholarships).
 - f. Conducting qualitative inventories of the terrestrial invertebrates and conducting water and plant surveys to determine different varieties of species located on Campbell Tract. Assisting with visitor surveys through the Limits of Acceptable Change program designed to monitor the visitor experience and health of resources on Campbell Tract.
 - g. Maintaining the Science Center grounds and the 12 miles of nonmotorized recreation trails on Campbell Tract through events such as National Trails Day, National Public Lands Day, and Scoop the Poop Day.
 - h. Capital Improvement Projects such as the installation of a 100-seat amphitheater through an Eagle Scout Project.
7. *Science in a Backpack* – The CCSC’s Science in a Backpack program enables citizens to investigate the health and diversity of Campbell Tract through self-guided study. Some of the Backpacks currently in use are the Water Quality Backpack and the Insect Survey Backpack. This program is an easily packaged and transferable concept for many other BLM environmental education support centers, particularly those near urban centers such as the Cascade Streamwatch and Yaquina Head in Oregon, the Moab Information Center and St. George Interagency Information Center in Utah, and the Red Rock Canyon in Nevada.
8. *Awards and Recognition* - Since its inception, the CCSC has received a number of awards and recognitions from various organizations.

- a. *The BLM received more than 450 comments from the community asking to maintain the Campbell Tract in BLM control rather than ending the land withdrawal.* Only two comments received were opposed. This recognition also changed the opinion and attitude of management about the utility of engaging the community through the Science Center and the Campbell Tract recreation program.
- b. *In November 2001, the CCSC received the BLM's Excellence in Interpretation and Environmental Education Award* – This award recognizes the accomplishments and contributions of BLM employees who have made a significant difference in the field of interpretation and environmental education.

Arizona Recreation Fee Demonstration Evaluation FY02 Best Practices

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Yuma Field Office

The Fee Demonstration Projects, in and around Quartzite and along the Yuma Colorado Riverway, within the Yuma Field Office have evolved first as a response to numerous critical land conservation problems, hazardous conditions and social issues arising on public lands brought on by long term visitors, trespassing, and unauthorized concessions; and second as a continuing response to increased public demand for both short and long term visitation and recreation. Fee demo funds have been used to develop and maintain the sites that carry hundreds of thousands of visitors a year. This is managed with very low budgets, few staff, and a compliment of 80-100 volunteers. Field Office recreation staff have used innovative funding sources, including \$1,142,000, in grants since 1991 from AZ and CA to continue development to try to keep pace with increasing demand.

As an example of the important contribution of BLM to the community and to the preservation of the resources, the following story relates the Betty's Kitchen situation and BLM intervention.

In the 1960s through the early 1980s, the area near Squaw Lake, behind Lagoona Reservoir, and the Colorado River known as Betty's Kitchen (so named because of a café/bar that had been established on public land without a permit and was well known in the area), had over a thousand trespass and squatter homes and businesses set-up on public land. These establishments and homes were in a flood plain. In the 1960s a separate Department of Interior (DOI) agency was established to convert these homes/businesses to lease. Later the Yuma FO was established, largely to deal with these lands, and the DOI agency was closed. However, in 1983, the Colorado River flooded the area out. BLM and the residents cleaned the area out. Dispersed recreation became the typical use of the resources thereafter.

Over 20 years ago, BLM built a restroom, picnic tables and a parking area which gave rise to a pattern of family-oriented day-use of the lands. Twelve years ago, these facilities were modernized and expanded, in part using grant funds, and providing for accessibility. A national recreation trail was developed and interpretation was developed, as well as extensive curriculum for schools through work with the BLM biologist and the Betty's Kitchen Protective Association (no longer active). Upon dedication, the superintendent of schools reported that over 10,000 students had visited the site and received environmental education. The interface with the schools has degraded, due to the loss of the BLM biologist and the continued interpretive specialist vacancy which can not be funded. Further the U.S. Marines helped to develop the site, providing labor to build the facilities with BLM purchased materials.

Unfortunately, after the renovation, extensive vandalism started. The vandalism gave rise to a shift in the demographics away from visitors and toward gangs. The staff decided to use the "broken window" cure, i.e. fix vandalism and clean-up graffiti as soon as it occurs and prosecute minor crimes if possible. This presence and persistence on the part of BLM and the community (AZ Western College Police, Marine patrols, City & County Police in the Yuma Gang Task Force) led to another shift back to family-oriented use. Further, developing and instituting fees helped to keep the demographic of visitors family-oriented.

Another one of the best aspects of the Yuma FO Fee Demonstration Program is its extensive relationships with the community and other local government agencies, including in particular the Bureau of Reclamation and the AZ Game and Fish Department.

- Public meetings resulted in development of a \$50 annual pass, largely used by local residents, to use the various fee demo areas
- This interdisciplinary approach has also helped in developing common signing across State and Federal Agencies.

- Accommodation of the Yuma tourism interests for increasing non-winter use of the area by helping to coordinate and conduct the interdisciplinary annual Yuma Birding and Nature Festival. Not only does the festival bring needed income into the community in the off-season, it also generates great opportunities for environmental education and interpretation.

Other best practices include:

- Use of on-site facilities for maintenance contractors at Squaw Lake—increasing presence, making maintenance an “in my back yard” issue, and providing continuity between the winter and summer seasonal movement of hosts.
- Use of hosts who live at the campground portion of the site. These hosts provide additional on-site presence, some labor and help with miscellaneous visitor services, as well as fee collection and compliance.
 - Pins for hosts for years of service are used. This simple, low-cost idea really works to provide a bit of recognition to the hosts. They obviously take pride in the annual pin additions.
 - Volunteers have developed excellent manuals for volunteer opportunities and for fee collections.
- LE support for collections.
- The LaPosa LTVA uses a permit accountability process that makes it very easy to keep the collections perfectly reconciled, excellent separation of duties, and great sense of well-being among hosts that the monies are well-accounted for.
- The Park Ranger developed a simple and essentially no-cost program to redistribute people in free and 14 day areas into the LTVA and in the process increase fee collections, simply by providing a 1-page flyer called “Did You Know.” The flyer describes the facilities at the LTVA and lets people know that they can use it by paying for a \$25 14-day permit. Many people relocate for the facilities and the opportunity for a longer stay and are happy to pay the fee.
- Common planning and allocation of resources across engineering and recreation projects within the Yuma FO is enabled by having engineering and recreation report to the same boss, the Assistant Field Manager, Merv Boyd.
- To eliminate the backup of snowbirds entering the LTVA in their RVs, the LaPosa area has a temporary parking area just beyond the gate, where people can park and return on foot to complete their permits.
- To increase compliance during the peak season, permits are required to use the dumping and water station.
- The database used for permit information has additional uses for law enforcement, locating relatives, accommodating requests for visitor information, and mailings to return visitors.
- Regular fee increases are made annually to continue to provide funding for the sites. This works very well, even with relatively high annual percentage increases, to alleviate complaints, as opposed to very large increases every three or four years. Further, the development of the 14 day \$25 dollar fee has provided people with an alternative to the 6-month LTVA fee. Further, most increases in fee amount have been followed up with increases in duration of stay. Facilities also continue to improve annually.

- The Yuma FO participates with CA LTVA staff in an annual meeting on LTVA management. In these meetings, the two states coordinate on fees, facilities improvements, standard management, problem solving, etc.
- The Yuma FO should be commended for making a priority to hire an Administrative Officer to help improve their accounting business processes and monitor their budget more appropriately.
- The FO is also looking at better ways to spend their 1232 funding more appropriately for FY2002. They identified their labor issue and have already planned appropriately for upcoming year.
- The staff has been in the Yuma FO for many years. As such, they really know the fee demo and recreation programs and the associated fee collections regulations, as well as the issues in the communities and on the land. This knowledge leads to effective relationships both internally within the Yuma FO programs, and externally, within other agencies and the local communities.
- Procedures are in place to protect the health and welfare of the employees. This is accomplished by using personal protective equipment, such as gloves and masks, when opening the locked bags and boxes.
- The recreation staff initiated and conducted an extensive public mailing (postcards) to alert past and potential visitors that the use fees for the LTVAs were increasing in FY2002.

Lake Havasu Field Office

- The concessions program has dramatically helped to fund the recreation program in Lake Havasu FO. Without that program, the Lake Havasu developments would not be possible, leading to major resource degradation and continued public safety risks. The development has solved a major state problem and created a very attractive recreation asset.
- The public appear to be very approving and interested in the development and improvements which have provided clean, working restrooms, which in the 1999 survey were identified as a major issue for the public as BLM took over the State resources (in late 1997) and has slowly replaced the State toilets with new ecologically safe units. Staff are very proud of and pleased with the clean up of this toxic situation. Further, the public can now land boats safely; BLM has doubled the number of trash receptacles, and visitation is up dramatically.
- Recreation staff are excellent “scroungers.” That is they keep their eyes open for and use material available from many diverse sources including such items as donations of trash cans from a local manufacturer, surplus materials used for post and cable fencing, military surplus materials, surplus vehicles, and even surplus vessels, etc. One specific example is installing foam in pontoons of one maintenance boat, rather than buying new pontoons, was accomplished in one tenth of the cost and one quarter of the time.

- Development of the \$50 annual permit process should help to increase the amount collected on Lake Havasu and give local community members a more convenient way to pay for use of the Lake facilities.
- As a general rule, office staff know never to collect or count money with only one person present.
- The office seems to work as a team with the participation of all three branches assisting the recreation and administrative staffs with the fee demo program. This office is doing an excellent job in managing their resources with the available qualified personnel they have on hand. Lack of qualified personnel restricts this offices full compliance with financial/collections requirements.
 - Lake Havasu FO management has been aware and concerned about meeting the fee collection requirements and have been very open to new ideas and willing to make various process changes to help meet these requirements. The office has been very creative and flexible to meet these requirements considering the limited amount of staff available to perform such duties.

